Jury Finds Cockrell Guilty Of Concealing Car Radio

By WAYNE CHASTAIN
Press-Scimitar Staff Writer

Claude Cockrell Jr., Memphis businessman and one-time American Party candidate for Congress, today faced eight years in the penitentiary after being convicted of receiving and concealing a South Central Bell mobile radio telephone.

The instrument can be used to place calls to any place in the nation and overseas, said Asst. Atty. Gen. Ewell Richardson.

A jury brought in the verdict last night after Richardson had subjected Cockrell to a low-key but searching one-hour cross-examination. Cockrell took the stand in his own behalf.

This climaxed a week-long case before Criminal Court Judge Arthur Faquin.

John Collier, a key prosecution witness, testified that he had been a friend of Cockrell. He said he once accompanied Cockrell to the office of Gov. John Bell Williams in Jackson, Miss., to discuss a farm transaction.

Collier said he fell out with Cockrell last year after he had lost $7,000 on an oil lease venture with Cockrell. Before this incident occurred, however, Cockrell had delivered to him a box sealed with plastic tape and asked him to keep it for him, Collier said.

Collier said he turned the box over to the police shortly before Christmas last year, after learning that police had searched the Cockrell Container Corp., 208 Poplar, on a warrant charging Cockrell with receiving and concealing a stolen South Central Bell radio telephone.

Memphis Police Lt. J. P. Talley testified that he led a detail to the Poplar address with a warrant after a telephone company official signed a complaint that he had seen Cockrell talking over the instrument while sitting in a Lincoln Continental parked near the Shelby County Courthouse.

CLAUDE COCKRELL JR.

Talley said there was evidence that the mobile unit had once been installed in the vehicle.

Two other defendants, Morris Gammon Jr., 41, and M. K. Ratliff, 31, were acquitted. They had been indicted on charges of larceny in addition to the same charges against Cockrell.

The indictment charged that Ratliff originally had rented the instrument from the company, that his automobile later was wrecked, and while it was being repaired, the instrument had been removed; and that Gammon, an accountant for the garage, had reported to the telephone company that it had been stolen.

Under cross-examination by Richardson, Cockrell denied that he had assumed the aliases of Johnny McNamara and Carl Bishop.

Earlier, Richardson had placed on the stand Henry Lesh, owner of a communication repair shop, who identified Cockrell as a man who drove a Lincoln Continental into the shop and asked for repairs on the mobile telephone system.

Lesh testified that his mechanic had discovered the Bell system numbers on the instrument and contacted the telephone company. Meanwhile, Lesh said, the man had first signed the repair bill as "Carl Bishop," but later signed a check under the name as "Johnny McNamara."

An American National Bank employe, Mrs. Carolyn Edwards, testified that she was familiar with a bank account opened by a man who identified himself as Johnny McNamara, and then pointed Cockrell out in court as the man purporting to be McNamara.

Cockrell denied on the witness stand that the Continental taken to Lesh was his, claiming it belonged to a friend of his, Carl Bishop of Panama City, Panama.

"I signed the repair bill because the car belonged to him," he said.

When Richardson asked him if he knew how to get in touch with Bishop, Cockrell [illegible] that [illegible] worked somewhere in South America for a major oil company.

Cockrell ran against Rep. Dan Kuykendall in 1968 on the American Party ticket, claiming also that he was a major organizer in the South for George Wallace for president.

He announced for a 1969 special congressional election as an American Party candidate but withdrew.